

SHE WALKS IN BEAUTY¹

By FANNIE HURST

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BY that same mausolean instinct that was Artimesia's when she mourned her dear departed in marble and hieroglyphics; by that same architectural gesture of grief which caused Jehan at Agra to erect the Taj Mahal in memory of a dead wife and a cold hearthstone, so the Bon Ton Hotel, even to the pillars with red-freckled monoliths and peacock-backed lobby chairs, making the analogy rather absurdly complete, reared its fourteen stories of "Elegantly furnished suites, all the comforts and none of the discomforts of home."

A mausoleum to the hearth. And as true to form as any that ever mourned the dynastic bones of an Augustus or a Hadrian.

It is doubtful if in all its hothouse garden of women the Hotel Bon Ton boasted a broken finger-nail or that little brash place along the forefinger that rattles so of potato peeling or asparagus scraping.

The fourteenth story, Manicure, Steam-bath, and Beauty Parlors, saw to all that. In spite of long bridge-table, lobby-divan and *table d'hôte* séances, "tea" where the coffee was served with whipped cream and the tarts built in four tiers and mortared in mocha filling, the Bon Ton Hotel was scarcely more than an average of fourteen pounds over-weight.

Forty's silhouette, except for that cruel and irrefutable place where the throat will wattle, was almost interchangeable with eighteen's. Indeed, Bon Ton grandmothers with backs and French heels that were twenty years younger than their throats and bunions, vied with twenty's profile.

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Whistler's kind of mother, full of sweet years that were richer because she had dwelt in them, but whose eyelids were a little weary, had no place there.

Mrs. Gronauer, who occupied an outside, southern-exposure suite of five rooms and three baths, jazz-danced on the same cabaret floor with her granddaughters.

Fads for the latest personal accoutrements gripped the Bon Ton in seasonal epidemics.

The permanent wave swept it like a tidal one.

The beaded bag, cunningly contrived, needleful by needleful, from little colored strands of glass caviar, glittered its hour.

Filet lace came then, sheerly, whole yokes of it for *crepe de Chine* nightgowns and dainty scalloped edges for camisoles.

Mrs. Samstag made six of the nightgowns that winter, three for herself and three for her daughter. Peach-blowy pink ones with lace yokes that were scarcely more to the skin than the print of a wave edge running up sand, and then little frills of pink satin ribbon, caught up here and there with the most delightful and unconvincing little blue satin rosebuds.

It was bad for her neuralgic eye, the meanderings of the *filet* pattern, but she liked the delicate threadiness of the handiwork, and Mr. Latz liked watching her.

There you have it! Straight through the lacy mesh of the *filet* to the heart interest!

Mr. Louis Latz, who was too short, slightly too stout, and too shy of likely length of swimming arm ever to have figured in any woman's inevitable visualization of her ultimate Leander, liked, fascinatedly, to watch Mrs. Samstag's nicely manicured fingers at work. He liked them passive, too. Best of all, he would have preferred to feel them between his own, but that had never been.

Nevertheless, that desire was capable of catching him unawares. That very morning as he had stood, in his sumptuous bachelor's apartment, strumming on one of the windows that overlooked an expensive tree and lake vista of Central Park, he had wanted very suddenly and very badly to feel those fingers in his and to kiss down on them. He liked their taper and the rosy pointedness, those fingers,

and the dry, neat way they had of slipping in between the threads.

On this, one of a hundred such typical evenings in the Bon Ton lobby, Mr. Latz, sighing out a satisfaction of his inner man, sat himself down on a red velvet chair opposite Mrs. Samstag. His knees wide-spread, taxed his knife-pressed gray trousers to their very last capacity, but he sat back in none the less evident comfort, building his fingers up into a little chapel.

"Well, how's Mr. Latz this evening?" asked Mrs. Samstag, her smile encompassing the question.

"If I was any better I couldn't stand it"—relishing her smile and his reply.

The Bon Ton had just dined, too well, from fruit-flip à la Bon Ton, mulligatawny soup, *filet* of sole, *sauté*, choice of, or both, Poulette *émincé* and spring lamb *grignon* and on through to fresh strawberry ice-cream in fluted paper boxes, *petit fours* and *demi-tasse*. Groups of carefully corseted women stood now beside the invitational plush divans and peacock chairs, paying twenty minutes after-dinner standing penance. Men with Wall Street eyes and blood pressure, slid surreptitious celluloid toothpicks, and gathered around the cigar stand. Orchestra music flickered. Young girls, the traditions of demure sixteen hanging by one inch shoulder-straps and who could not walk across a hardwood floor without sliding the last three steps, teetered in bare arm-in-arm groups, swapping persiflage with pimply, patent-leather haired young men who were full of nervous excitement and eager to excel in return badinage.

Bell hops scurried with folding tables. Bridge games formed.

The theater group got off, so to speak. Showy women and show-off men. Mrs. Gronauer, in a full length mink coat that enveloped her like a squaw, a titillation of diamond aigrettes in her Titianed hair and an aftermath of scent as tangible as the trail of a wounded shark, emerged from the elevator with her son and daughter-in-law.

"Foil!" said Mr. Latz, by way of — somewhat unduly perhaps — expressing his own kind of cognizance of the scented trail.

"*Fleur de printemps*," said Mrs. Samstag in quick olfactory analysis. "Eight ninety-eight an ounce." Her nose crawling up to what he thought the cunning perfection of a sniff.

"Used to it from home — not? She is not. Believe me, I knew Max Gronauer when he first started in the produce business in Jersey City and the only perfume he had was seventeen cents a pound, not always fresh killed at that. Cold storage *de printemps*."

"Max Gronauer died just two months after my husband," said Mrs. Samstag, tucking away into her beaded hand-bag her *filet* lace handkerchief, itself guilty of a not inexpensive attar.

"*Thu-thu*," clucked Mr. Latz for want of a fitting retort.

"Heigh-ho! I always say we have so little in common, me and Mrs. Gronauer. She revokes so in bridge, and I think it's terrible for a grandmother to blondine so red; but we've both been widows for almost eight years. Eight years," repeated Mrs. Samstag on a small scented sigh.

He was inordinately sensitive to these allusions, reddening and wanting to seem appropriate.

"Poor, poor little woman!"

"Heigh-ho," she said, and again, "Heigh-ho."

It was about the eyes that Mrs. Samstag showed most plainly whatever inroads into her clay the years might have gained. There were little dark areas beneath them like smeared charcoal and two unrelenting sacs that threatened to become pouchy.

Their effect was not so much one of years, but they gave Mrs. Samstag, in spite of the only slightly plump and really passable figure, the look of one out of health.

What ailed her was hardly organic. She was the victim of periodic and raging neuralgic fires that could sweep the right side of her head and down into her shoulder blade with a great crackling and blazing of nerves. It was not unusual for her daughter Alma to sit up the one or two nights that it could endure, unfailing, through the wee hours, with hot applications.

For a week sometimes, these attacks heralded their comings with little jabs, like the pricks of an exploring

needle. Then the under-eyes began to look their muddiest. They were darkening now and she put up two fingers with a little pressing movement to her temple.

"You're a great little woman," reiterated Mr. Latz, rather riveting even Mrs. Samstag's suspicion that here was no great stickler for variety of expression.

"And a great sufferer, too," he said, noting the pressing fingers.

She colored under this delightful impeachment.

"I wouldn't wish one of my neuralgia spells to my worst enemy, Mr. Latz."

"If you were mine — I mean — if — the — say — was mine, I wouldn't stop until I had you to every specialist in Europe. I know a thing or two about those fellows over there. Some of them are wonders."

Mrs. Samstag looked off, her profile inclined to lift and fall as if by little pulleys of emotion.

"That's easier said than done, Mr. Latz, by a—a widow who wants to do right by her grown daughter and living so — high since the war."

"I—I—" said Mr. Latz, leaping impulsively forward on the chair that was as tightly upholstered in effect as he in his modish suit, then clutching himself there as if he had caught the impulse on the fly — "I just wish I could help."

"Oh!" she said, and threw up a swift, brown look from the lace making.

He laughed, but from nervousness.

"My little mother was an ailer too."

"That's me, Mr. Latz. Not sick — just ailing. I always say that it's ridiculous that a woman in such perfect health as I am should be such a sufferer."

"Same with her and her joints."

"Why, I can outdo Alma when it comes to dancing down in the grill with the young people of an evening, or shopping."

"More like sisters than any mother and daughter I ever saw."

"Mother and daughter, but which is which from the back, some of my friends put it," said Mrs. Samstag, not without a curve to her voice, then hastily: "But the best

child, Mr. Latz. The best that ever lived. A regular little mother to me in my spells."

"Nice girl, Alma."

"It snowed so the day of — my husband's funeral. Why, do you know that up to then I never had an attack of neuralgia in my life. Didn't even know what a headache was. That long drive. That windy hill-top with two men to keep me from jumping into the grave after him. Ask Alma. That's how I care when I care. But of course, as the saying is, time heals. But that's how I got my first attack. Intenseness is what the doctors called it. I'm terribly intense."

"I — guess when a woman like you — cares like — you — cared, it's not much use hoping you would ever — care again. That's about the way of it, ain't it?"

If he had known it, there was something about his own intensity of expression to inspire mirth. His eyebrows lifted to little gothic arches of anxiety, a rash of tiny perspiration broke out over his blue shaved face and as he sat on the edge of his chair, it seemed that inevitably the tight sausage-like knees must push their way through mere fabric.

"That's about the way of it, ain't it?" he said again into the growing silence.

"I — when a woman cares for — a man like — I did — Mr. Latz, she'll never be happy until — she cares again — like that. I always say, once an affectionate nature, always an affectionate nature."

"You mean," he said, leaning forward the imperceptible half-inch that was left of chair, "you mean — me?"

The smell of bay rum came out greenly then as the moisture sprang out on his scalp.

"I — I'm a home woman, Mr. Latz. You can put a fish in water but you cannot make him swim. That's me and hotel life."

At this somewhat cryptic apothegm Mr. Latz's knee touched Mrs. Samstag's, so that he sprang back full of nerves at what he had not intended.

"Marry me, Carrie," he said more abruptly than he might have, without the act of that knee to immediately justify.

She spread the lace out on her lap.

Ostensibly to the hotel lobby, they were casual as, "My mulligatawny soup was cold tonight" or "Have you heard the new one that Al Jolson pulls at the Winter Garden?" But actually, the roar was high in Mrs. Samstag's ears and he could feel the plethoric red rushing in flashes over his body.

"Marry me, Carrie," he said, as if to prove that his stiff lips could repeat their incredible feat.

With a woman's talent for them, her tears sprang.

"Mr. Latz ——"

"Louis," he interpolated, widely eloquent of posture.

"You're proposing — Louis!" She explained rather than asked, and placed her hand to her heart so prettily that he wanted to crush it there with his kisses.

"God bless you for knowing it so easy, Carrie. A young girl would make it so hard. It's just what has kept me from asking you weeks ago, this getting it said. Carrie, will you?"

"I'm a widow, Mr. Latz — Louis ——"

"Loo ——"

"L — Loo. With a grown daughter. Not one of those merry widows you read about."

"That's me! A bachelor on top but a home-man underneath. Why, up to five years ago, Carrie, while the best little mother a man ever had was alive, I never had eyes for a woman or ——"

"It's common talk what a grand son you were to her, Mr. La—Louis ——"

"Loo!"

"Loo."

"I don't want to seem to brag, Carrie, but you saw the coat that just walked out on Mrs. Gronauer? My little mother, she was a humpback, Carrie, not a real one, but all stooped from the heavy years when she was helping my father to get his start. Well, anyway, that little stooped back was one of the reasons why I was so anxious to make it up to her. Y'understand?"

"Yes — Loo."

"But you saw that mink coat? Well, my little mother, three years before she died, was wearing one like that in

sable. Real Russian. Set me back eighteen thousand, wholesale, and she never knew different than that it cost eighteen hundred. Proudest moment of my life when I helped my little old mother into her own automobile in that sable coat."

"I had some friends lived in the Grenoble Apartments when you did — the Adelbergs. They used to tell me how it hung right down to her heels and she never got into the auto that she didn't pick it up so as not to sit on it."

"That there coat is packed away in cold storage, now, Carrie, waiting, without me exactly knowing why, I guess, for — the one little woman in the world besides her I would let so much as touch its hem."

Mrs. Samstag's lips parted, her teeth showing through like light.

"Oh," she said, "sable. That's my fur, Loo. I've never owned any, but ask Alma if I don't stop to look at it in every show window. Sable!"

"Carrie — would you — could you — I'm not what you would call a youngster in years, I guess, but forty-four ain't ——"

"I'm — forty-one, Louis. A man like you could have younger."

"No. That's what I don't want. In my lonesomeness, after my mother's death, I thought once that maybe a young girl from the West, nice girl with her mother from Ohio — but I — funny thing, now I come to think about it — I never once mentioned my little mother's sable coat to her. I couldn't have satisfied a young girl like that or her me, Carrie, any more than I could satisfy Alma. It was one of those mama-made matches that we got into because we couldn't help it and out of it before it was too late. No, no, Carrie, what I want is a woman near to my own age."

"Loo, I — I couldn't start in with you even with the one little lie that gives every woman a right to be a liar. I'm forty-three, Louis — nearer to forty-four. You're not mad, Loo?"

"God love it! If that ain't a little woman for you! Mad? Just doing that little thing with me raises your stock fifty per cent."

"I'm — that way."

"We're a lot alike, Carrie. At heart, I'm a home man, Carrie, and unless I'm pretty much off my guess, you are, too — I mean a home woman. Right?"

"Me all over, Loo. Ask Alma if ——"

"I've got the means, too, Carrie, to give a woman a home to be proud of."

"Just for fun, ask Alma, Loo, if one year since her father's death I haven't said, 'Alma, I wish I had the heart to go back housekeeping.'"

"I knew it!"

"But I ask you, Louis, what's been the incentive? Without a man in the house I wouldn't have the same interest. That first winter after my husband died I didn't even have the heart to take the summer-covers off the furniture. You can believe me or not, but half the time with just me to eat it, I wouldn't bother with more than a cold snack for supper and every one knew what a table we used to set. But with no one to come home evenings expecting a hot meal ——"

"You poor little woman. I know how it is. Why, if I used to so much as telephone that I couldn't get home for supper right away I knew my little mother would turn out the gas under what was cooking and not eat enough herself to keep a bird alive."

"Housekeeping is no life for a woman alone. On the other hand, Mr. Latz — Louis — Loo, on my income, and with a daughter growing up, and naturally anxious to give her the best, it hasn't been so easy. People think I'm a rich widow and with her father's memory to consider and a young lady daughter, naturally I let them think it, but on my seventy-four hundred a year it has been hard to keep up appearances in a hotel like this. Not that I think you think I'm a rich widow, but just the same, that's me every time. Right out with the truth from the start."

"It shows you're a clever little manager to be able to do it."

"We lived big and spent big while my husband lived. He was as shrewd a jobber in knit underwear as the business ever saw, but — well, you know how it is. Pneumonia.

I always say he wore himself out with conscientiousness."

"Maybe you don't believe it, Carrie, but it makes me happy what you just said about money. It means I can give you things you couldn't afford for yourself. I don't say this for publication, Carrie, but in Wall Street alone, outside of my brokerage business, I cleared eighty-six thousand last year. I can give you the best. You deserve it, Carrie. Will you say yes?"

"My daughter, Loo. She's only eighteen, but she's my shadow — I lean on her so."

"A sweet, dutiful girl like Alma would be the last to stand in her mother's light."

"She's my only. We're different natured. Alma's a Samstag through and through, quiet, reserved. But she's my all, Louis. I love my baby too much to — to marry where she wouldn't be as welcome as the day itself. She's precious to me, Louis."

"Why, of course. You wouldn't be you if she wasn't. You think I would want you to feel different?"

"I mean — Louis — no matter where I go, more than with most children, she's part of me, Loo. I — why that child won't so much as go to spend the night with a girl friend away from me. Her quiet ways don't show it, but Alma has character! You wouldn't believe it, Louis, how she takes care of me."

"Why, Carrie, the first thing we pick out in our new home will be a room for her."

"Loo!"

"Not that she will want it long the way I see that young rascal Friedlander sits up to her. A better young fellow and a better business head you couldn't pick for her. Didn't that youngster go out to Dayton the other day and land a contract for the surgical fittings for a big new hospital out there before the local firms even rubbed the sleep out of their eyes? I have it from good authority, Friedlander & Sons doubled their excess-profits tax last year."

A white flash of something that was almost fear seemed to strike Mrs. Samstag into a rigid pallor.

"No! No! I'm not like most mothers, Louis, for marrying their daughters off. I want her with me. If marrying her off is your idea, it's best you know it now in the begin-

ning. I want my little girl with me — I have to have my little girl with me!"

He was so deeply moved that his eyes were moist.

"Why, Carrie, every time you open your mouth, you only prove to me further what a grand little woman you are."

"You'll like Alma, when you get to know her, Louis."

"Why, I do now. Always have said she's a sweet little thing."

"She is quiet and hard to get acquainted with at first, but that is reserve. She's not forward like most young girls nowadays. She's the kind of a child that would rather sit upstairs evenings with a book or her sewing than here in the lobby. She's there now."

"Give me that kind every time, in preference to all these gay young chickens that know more they oughtn't to know about life before they start than my little mother did when she finished."

"But do you think that girl will go to bed before I come up? Not a bit of it. She's been my comforter and my salvation in my troubles. More like the mother, I sometimes tell her, and me the child. If you want me, Louis, it's got to be with her too. I couldn't give up my baby — not my baby."

"Why, Carrie, have your baby to your heart's content. She's got to be a fine girl to have you for a mother and now it will be my duty to please her as a father. Carrie will you have me?"

"Oh, Louis — Loo!"

"Carrie, my dear!"

And so it was that Carrie Samstag and Louis Latz came into their betrothal.

None the less, it was with some misgivings and red lights burning high on her cheek-bones that Mrs. Samstag, at just after ten that evening, turned the knob of the door that entered into her little sitting-room, but in this case, a room redeemed by an upright piano with a green silk and gold-lace shaded floor lamp glowing by it. Two gilt-framed photographs and a cluster of ivory knickknacks on the white mantel. A heap of hand-made cushions. Art editions of the gift-poets and some circulating library

novels. A fireside chair, privately owned and drawn up, ironically enough, beside the gilded radiator, its head rest worn from kindly service to Mrs. Samstag's neuralgic brow.

From the nest of cushions in the circle of lamp glow, Alma sprang up at her mother's entrance. Sure enough she had been reading and her cheek was a little flushed and crumpled from where it has been resting in the palm of her hand.

"Mama," she said, coming out of the circle of light and switching on the ceiling bulbs, "you stayed down so late."

There was a slow prettiness to Alma. It came upon you like a little dawn, palely at first and then pinkening to a pleasant consciousness that her small face was heart-shaped and clear as an almond, that the pupils of her gray eyes were deep and dark like cisterns and to young Leo Friedlander, rather apt his comparison, too, her mouth was exactly the shape of a small bow that had shot its quiverful of arrows into his heart.

And instead of her eighteen she looked sixteen. There was that kind of timid adolescence about her, yet when she said, "Mama, you stayed down so late," the bang of a little pistol-shot was back somewhere in her voice.

"Why — Mr. Latz — and I — sat and talked."

An almost imperceptible nerve was dancing against Mrs. Samstag's right temple. Alma could sense, rather than see the ridge of pain.

"You're all right, mama?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Samstag, and plumped rather than sat herself down on a divan, its naked greenness relieved by a thrown scarf of black velvet, stenciled in gold.

"You shouldn't have remained down so long if your head is hurting," said her daughter, and quite casually took up her mother's beaded hand-bag where it had fallen in her lap, but her fingers feeling lightly and furtively as if for the shape of its contents.

"Stop that," said Mrs. Samstag, jerking it back, a dull anger in her voice.

"Come to bed, mama. If you're in for neuralgia, I'll fix the electric pad."

Suddenly Mrs. Samstag shot out her arm, rather slim

looking in the invariable long sleeve she affected, drawing Alma back toward her by the ribbon sash of her pretty chiffon frock.

"Alma, be good to mama tonight! Sweetheart — be good to her."

The quick suspecting fear that had motivated Miss Samstag's groping along the beaded hand-bag shot out again in her manner.

"Mama — you haven't?"

"No, no. Don't nag me. It's something else, Alma. Something mama is very happy about."

"Mama, you've broken your promise again."

"No. No. No. Alma, I've been a good mother to you, haven't I?"

"Yes, mama, yes, but what——"

"Whatever else I've been hasn't been my fault — you've always blamed Heyman."

"Mama, I don't understand."

"I've caused you worry, Alma — terrible worry. But everything is changed now. Mama's going to turn over a new leaf that everything is going to be happiness in this family."

"Dearest, if you knew how happy it makes me to hear you say that."

"Alma, look at me."

"Mama, you — you frighten me."

"You like Louis Latz, don't you, Alma?"

"Why yes, mama. Very much."

"We can't all be young and handsome like Leo, can we?"

"You mean ——"

"I mean that finer and better men than Louis Latz aren't lying around loose. A man who treated his mother like a queen and who worked himself up from selling newspapers on the street to a millionaire."

"Mama?"

"Yes, baby. He asked me tonight. Come to me, Alma, stay with me close. He asked me tonight."

"What?"

"You know. Haven't you seen it coming for weeks? I have."

"Seen what?"

"Don't make mama come out and say it. For eight years I've been as grieving a widow to a man as a woman could be. But I'm human, Alma, and he — asked me tonight."

There was a curious pallor came over Miss Samstag's face, as if smeared there by a hand.

"Asked you what?"

"Alma, it don't mean I'm not true to your father as I was the day I buried him in that blizzard back there, but could you ask for a finer, steadier man than Louis Latz? It looks out of his face."

"Mama, you — what — are you saying?"

"Alma?"

There lay a silence between them that took on the roar of a simoon and Miss Samstag jumped then from her mother's embrace, her little face stiff with the clench of her mouth.

"Mama — you — no — no. Oh, mama — Oh ——"

A quick spout of hysteria seemed to half strangle Mrs. Samstag, so that she slanted backward, holding her throat.

"I knew it. My own child against me. Oh, God! Why was I born? My own child against me!"

"Mama — you can't marry him. You can't marry — anybody."

"Why can't I marry anybody? Must I be afraid to tell my own child when a good man wants to marry me and give us both a good home? That's my thanks for making my child my first consideration — before I accepted him."

"Mama, you didn't accept him. Darling, you wouldn't do a — thing like that!"

Miss Samstag's voice thickened up then, quite frantically, into a little scream that knotted in her throat and she was suddenly so small and stricken, that with a gasp for fear she might crumple up where she stood, Mrs. Samstag leaned forward, catching her again by the sash.

"Alma!"

It was only for an instant, however. Suddenly Miss Samstag was her coolly firm little self, the bang of authority back in her voice.

"You can't marry Louis Latz."

"Can't I? Watch me."

"You can't do that to a nice, deserving fellow like him!"

"Do what?"

"That!"

Then Mrs. Samstag threw up both her hands to her face, rocking in an agony of self-abandon that was rather horrid to behold.

"Oh, God, why don't you put me out of it all? My misery! I'm a leper to my own child!"

"Oh — mama —"

"Yes, a leper. Hold my misfortune against me. Let my neuralgia and Doctor Heyman's prescription to cure it ruin my life. Rob me of what happiness with a good man there is left in it for me. I don't want happiness. Don't expect it. I'm here just to suffer. My daughter will see to that. Oh, I know what is on your mind. You want to make me out something — terrible — because Dr. Heyman once taught me how to help myself a little when I'm nearly wild with neuralgia. Those were doctor's orders. I'll kill myself before I let you make me out something terrible. I never even knew what it was before the doctor gave his prescription. I'll kill — you hear — kill myself."

She was hoarse, she was tear splotted so that her lips were slippery with them, and while the ague of her passion shook her, Alma, her own face swept white and her voice guttered with restraint, took her mother into the cradle of her arms, and rocked and hushed her there.

"Mama, mama, what are you saying? I'm not blaming you, sweetheart. I blame him — Dr. Heyman — for prescribing it in the beginning. I know your fight. How brave it is. Even when I'm crossest with you, I realize. Alma's fighting with you, dearest, every inch of the way until — you're cured! And then — maybe — some day — anything you want! But not now. Mama, you wouldn't marry Louis Latz now!"

"I would. He's my cure. A good home with a good man and money enough to travel and forget myself. Alma, mama knows she's not an angel — sometimes when she thinks what she's put her little girl through this last year,

she just wants to go out on the hill-top where she caught the neuralgia and lay down beside that grave out there and——”

“Mama, don’t talk like that!”

“But now’s my chance, Alma, to get well. I’ve too much worry in this big hotel trying to keep up big expenses on little money and ——”

“I know it, mama. That’s why I’m so in favor of finding ourselves a sweet, tiny little apartment with kitch ——”

“No! Your father died with the world thinking him a rich man and it will never find out from me that he wasn’t. I won’t be the one to humiliate his memory — a man who enjoyed keeping up appearances the way he did. Oh, Alma, Alma, I’m going to get well now. I promise. So help me God, if I ever give in to — to it again.”

“Mama, please. For God’s sake, you’ve said the same thing so often only to break your promise.”

“I’ve been weak, Alma; I don’t deny it. But nobody who hasn’t been tortured as I have, can realize what it means to get relief just by——”

“Mama, you’re not playing fair this minute. That’s the frightening part. It isn’t only the neuralgia any more. It’s just desire. That’s what’s so terrible to me, mama. The way you have been taking it these last months. Just from — desire.”

Mrs. Samstag buried her face, shuddering down into her hands.

“Oh, God, my own child against me!”

“No, mama. Why, sweetheart, nobody knows better than I do how sweet and good you are when you are away — from it. We’ll fight it together and win! I’m not afraid. It’s been worse this last month because you’ve been nervous, dear. I understand now. You see, I — didn’t dream of you and — Louis Latz. We’ll forget — we’ll take a little two room apartment of our own, darling, and get your mind on housekeeping and I’ll take up stenography or social ser——”

“What good am I anyway? No good. In my own way. In my child’s way. A young man like Leo Friedlander crazy to propose and my child can’t let him come to the point because she is afraid to leave her mother. Oh, I

know — I know more than you think I do. Ruining your life! That's what I am, and mine too!"

Tears now ran in hot cascades down Alma's cheeks.

"Why, mama, as if I cared about anything — just so you — get well."

"I know what I've done. Ruined my baby's life and now——"

"No!"

"Then help me, Alma. Louis wants me for his happiness. I want him for mine. Nothing will cure me like having a good man to live up to. The minute I find myself getting the craving for — it — don't you see, baby, fear that a good husband like Louis could find out such a thing about me would hold me back. See, Alma?"

"That's a wrong basis to start married life on——"

"I'm a woman who needs a man to baby her, Alma. That's the cure for me. Not to let me would be the same as to kill me. I've been a bad, weak woman, Alma, to be so afraid that maybe Leo Friedlander would steal you away from me. We'll make it a double wedding, baby!"

"Mama, mama, I'll never leave you."

"All right then, so you won't think your new father and me want to get rid of you. The first thing we'll pick out in our new home, he said it himself tonight, is Alma's room."

"I tell you it's wrong. It's wrong!"

"The rest with Leo can come later, after I've proved to you for a little while that I'm cured. Alma, don't cry! It's my cure. Just think, a good man. A beautiful home to take my mind off — worry. He said tonight he wants to spend a fortune if necessary to cure — my neuralgia."

"Oh, mama, mama, if it were only — that!"

"Alma, if I promise on my — my life! I never felt the craving so little as I do — now."

"You've said that before — and before."

"But never, with such a wonderful reason. It's the beginning of a new life. I know it. I'm cured!"

"Mama, if I thought you meant it."

"I do. Alma, look at me. This very minute I've a real jumping case of neuralgia. But I wouldn't have

anything for it except the electric pad. I feel fine. Strong! Alma, the bad times with me are over."

"Oh, mama, mama, how I pray you're right."

"You'll thank God for the day that Louis Latz proposed to me. Why, I'd rather cut off my right hand than marry a man who could ever live to learn such a — thing about me."

"But it's not fair. We'll have to explain to him, dear, that we hope you're cured now, but ——"

"If you do — if you do — I'll kill myself! I won't live to bear that! You don't want me cured. You want to get rid of me, to degrade me until I kill myself! If I was ever anything else than what I am now — to Louis Latz — anything but his ideal — Alma, you won't tell! Kill me, but don't tell — don't tell!"

"Why, you know I wouldn't, sweetheart, if it is so terrible to you. Never."

"Say it again."

"Never."

"As if it hasn't been terrible enough that you should have to know. But it's over, Alma. Your bad times with me are finished. I'm cured."

"But wait a little while, mama, just a year."

"No. No."

"A few months."

"Now. He wants it soon. The sooner the better at our age. Alma, mama's cured! What happiness. Kiss me, darling. So help me God, to keep my promises to you. Cured, Alma, cured."

And so in the end, with a smile on her lips that belied almost to herself the little run of fear through her heart, Alma's last kiss to her mother that night was the long one of felicitation.

And because love, even the talk of it, is so gamey on the lips of woman to woman, they lay in bed that night heart-beat to heart-beat, the electric pad under her pillow warm to the hurt of Mrs. Samstag's brow and talked, these two, deep into the stillness of the hotel night.

"My little baby, who's helped me through such bad times, it's your turn now, Alma, to be care-free, like other girls."

"I'll never leave you mama, even if — he shouldn't want me."

"He will, darling, and does! Those were his words. 'A room for Alma.'"

"I'll never leave you!"

"You will! Much as Louis and me want you with us every minute, we won't stand in your way! That's another reason I'm so happy, Alma. I'm not alone, any more now. Leo's so crazy over you, just waiting for the chance to — pop ——"

"Shh-sh-h-h."

"Don't tremble so, darling. Mama knows. He told Mrs. Gronauer last night when she was joking him to buy a ten dollar carnation for the Convalescent Home Bazaar, that he would only take one if it was white, because little white flowers reminded him of Alma Samstag."

"Oh, mama ——"

"Say, it is as plain as the nose on your face. He can't keep his eyes off you. He sells goods to Doctor Gronauer's clinic and he says the same thing about him. It makes me so happy, Alma, to think you won't have to hold him off any more."

"I'll never leave you. Never!"

None the less she was the first to drop off to sleep, pink, there in the dark, with the secret of her blushes.

Then for Mrs. Samstag the travail set in. Lying there with her raging head tossing this way and that on the heated pillow, she heard with cruel awareness, the *minutiae*, all the faint but clarified noises that can make a night seem so long. The distant click of the elevator, depositing a night-hawk. A plong of the bed spring. Somebody's cough. A train's shriek. The jerk of plumbing. A window being raised. That creak which lies hidden in every darkness, like a mysterious knee-joint. By three o'clock she was a quivering victim to these petty concepts, and her pillow so explored that not a spot but what was rumpled to the aching lay of her cheek.

Once Alma, as a rule supersensitive to her mother's slightest unrest, floated up for the moment out of her young sleep, but she was very drowsy and very tired

and dream-tides were almost carrying her back, as she said:

"Mama, are you all right?"

Simulating sleep, Mrs. Samstag lay tense until her daughter's breathing resumed its light cadence.

Then at four o'clock, the kind of nervousness that Mrs. Samstag had learned to fear, began to roll over her in waves, locking her throat and curling her toes and her fingers, and her tongue up dry against the roof of her mouth.

She must concentrate now — must steer her mind away from the craving!

Now then: West End Avenue. Louis liked the apartments there. Luxurious. Quiet. Residential. Circassian walnut or mahogany dining room? Alma should decide. A baby-grand piano. Later to be Alma's engagement gift from, "Mama and — Papa." No, "Mama and Louis." Better so.

How her neck and her shoulder-blade, and now her elbow, were flaming with the pain! She cried a little, far back in her throat with the small hissing noise of a steam-radiator, and tried a poor futile scheme for easing her head in the crotch of her elbow.

Now then: She must knit Louis some neckties. The silk-sweater-stitch would do. Married in a traveling-suit. One of those smart dark-blue twills like Mrs. Gronauer Junior's. Top-coat — sable. Louis' hair thinning. Tonic. Oh God, let me sleep. Please, God. The wheeze rising in her closed throat. That little threatening desire that must not shape itself! It darted with the hither and thither of a bee bumping against a garden wall. No. No. Ugh! The vast chills of nervousness. The flaming, the craving chills of desire!

Just this last giving-in. This once. To be rested and fresh for him tomorrow. Then never again. The little beaded handbag. Oh God, help me. That burning ache to rest and to uncurl of nervousness. All the thousand, thousand little pores of her body, screaming each one, to be placated. They hurt the entire surface of her. That great storm at sea in her head; the crackle of lightning down that arm —

Let me see — Circassian walnut — baby-grand — the pores demanding, crying — shrieking——

It was then that Carrie Samstag, even in her lovely pink night-dress, a crone with pain, and the cables out dreadfully in her neck, began by infinitesimal processes to swing herself gently to the side of the bed, unrelaxed inch by unrelaxed inch, softly and with the cunning born of travail.

It was actually a matter of fifteen minutes, that breathless swing toward the floor, the mattress rising after her with scarcely a whisper of its stuffings and her two bare feet landing patly into the pale blue room-slippers, there beside the bed.

Then her bag, the beaded one on the end of the divan. The slow taut feeling for it and the floor that creaked twice, starting the sweat out over her.

It was finally after more tortuous saving of floor creaks and the interminable opening and closing of a door that Carrie Samstag, the beaded bag in her hand, found herself face to face with herself in the mirror of the bathroom medicine chest.

She was shuddering with one of the hot chills, the needle and little glass piston out of the hand-bag and with a dry little insuck of breath, pinching up little areas of flesh from her arm, bent on a good firm perch, as it were.

There were undeniable pock-marks on Mrs. Samstag's right forearm. Invariably it sickened her to see them. Little graves. Oh, oh, little graves. For Alma. Herself. And now Louis. Just once. Just one more little grave —

And Alma, answering her somewhere down in her heart-beats: "No, mama, no, mama. No. No. No."

But all the little pores gaping. Mouths! The pinching up of the skin. Here, this little clean and white area.

"No, mama. No, mama. No. No. No."

"Just once, darling?" Oh — oh — graves for Alma and Louis. No. No. No.

Somehow, some way, with all the little mouths still parched and gaping and the clean and quite white area unblemished, Mrs. Samstag found her way back to bed. She was in a drench of sweat when she got there and the conflagration of neuralgia curiously enough, was now

roaring in her ears so that it seemed to her she could hear her pain.

Her daughter lay asleep, with her face to the wall, her flowing hair spread in a fan against the pillow and her body curled up cozily. The remaining hours of the night, in a kind of waking faint she could never find the words to describe, Mrs. Samstag, with that dreadful dew of her sweat constantly out over her, lay with her twisted lips to the faint perfume of that fan of Alma's flowing hair her toes curling in and out. Out and in. Toward morning she slept. Actually, sweetly and deeply as if she could never have done with deep draughts of it.

She awoke to the brief patch of sunlight that smiled into their apartment for about eight minutes of each forenoon.

Alma was at the pretty chore of lifting the trays from a hamper of roses. She places a shower of them on her mother's coverlet with a kiss, a deeper and dearer one somehow, this morning.

There was a card and Mrs. Samstag read it and laughed:
Good morning, Carrie.

Louis.

They seemed to her, poor dear, these roses, to be pink with the glory of the coming of the dawn.

On the spur of the moment and because the same precipitate decisions that determined Louis Latz's successes in Wall Street determined him here, they were married the following Thursday in Greenwich, Connecticut, without even allowing Carrie time for the blue twill traveling suit. She wore her brown velvet instead, looking quite modish, and a sable wrap, gift of the groom, lending genuine magnificence.

Alma was there, of course, in a beautiful fox scarf, also gift of the groom, and locked in a white kind of tension that made her seem more than ever like a little white flower to Leo Friendlander, the sole other attendant, and who during the ceremony yearned at her with his gaze. But her eyes were squeezed tight against his, as if to forbid herself the consciousness that life seemed suddenly so richly sweet to her — oh, so richly sweet!

There was a time during the first months of the married life of Louis and Carrie Latz, when it seemed to Alma, who in the sanctity of her lovely little ivory bedroom all appointed in rose-enamel toilet trifles, could be prayerful with the peace of it, that the old Carrie, who could come pale and terrible out of her drugged nights, belonged to some grimacing and chimeric past. A dead past that had buried its dead and its hatchet.

There had been a month at Hot Springs in the winter-green heart of Virginia, and whatever Louis may have felt in his heart, of his right to the privacy of these honeymoon days, was carefully belied on his lips, and at Alma's depriving him now and then of his wife's company, packing her off to rest when he wanted a climb with her up a mountain slope or a drive over piny roads, he could still smile and pinch her cheek.

"You're stingy to me with my wife, Alma," he said to her upon one of these provocations. "I don't believe she's got a daughter at all, but a little policeman instead."

And Alma smiled back, out of the agony of her constant consciousness that she was insinuating her presence upon him, and resolutely, so that her fear for him should always subordinate her fear of him, she bit down her sensitiveness in proportion to the rising tide of his growing, but still politely held in check, bewilderment.

One day, these first weeks of their marriage, because she saw the dreaded signal of the muddy pools under her mother's eyes and the little quivering nerve beneath the temple, she shut him out of her presence for a day and a night, and when he came fuming up every few minutes from the hotel veranda, miserable and fretting, met him at the closed door of her mother's darkened room and was adamant.

"It won't hurt if I tiptoe in and sit with her," he pleaded.

"No, Louis. No one knows how to get her through these spells like I do. The least excitement will only prolong her pain."

He trotted off then down the hotel corridor with a strut to his resentment that was bantam and just a little feisty.

That night as Alma lay beside her mother, fighting sleep and watching, Carrie rolled her eyes sidewise with the plea of a stricken dog in them.

"Alma," she whispered, "for God's sake, Just this once. To tide me over. One shot — darling. Alma, if you love me?"

Later, there was a struggle between them that hardly bears relating. A lamp was overturned. But toward morning, when Carrie lay exhausted, but at rest in her daughter's arms, she kept muttering in her sleep:

"Thank you, baby. You saved me. Never leave me, Alma. Never — never — never. You saved me Alma."

And then the miracle of those next months. The return to New York. The happily busy weeks of furnishing and the unlimited gratifications of the well-filled purse. The selection of the limousine with the special body that was fearfully and wonderfully made in mulberry upholstery with mother-of-pearl caparisons. The fourteen-room apartment on West End Avenue, with four baths, drawing-room of pink brocaded walls and Carrie's Roman bathroom that was precisely as large as her old hotel sitting room, with two full length wall-mirrors, a dressing table canopied in white lace over white satin and the marble bath itself, two steps down and with the rubber curtains that swished after.

There were evenings when Carrie, who loved the tyranny of things with what must have been a survival within her of the bazaar instinct, would fall asleep almost directly after dinner her head back against her husband's shoulder, roundly tired out after a day all cluttered up with matching the blue upholstery of their bedroom with taffeta bed hangings.

Latz liked her so, with her fragrantly coiffured head, scarcely gray, back against his shoulder and with his newspapers — Wall Street journals and the comic weeklies which he liked to read — would sit an entire evening thus, moving only when his joints rebelled, and his pipe smoke carefully directed away from her face.

Weeks and weeks of this and already Louis Latz's trousers were a little out of crease and Mrs. Latz after

eight o'clock and under cover of a very fluffy and very expensive negligée, would unhook her stays.

Sometimes friends came in for a game of small-stake poker, but after the second month they countermanded the standing order for Saturday night musical comedy seats. So often they discovered it was pleasanter to remain at home. Indeed, during these days of household adjustment, as many as four evenings a week Mrs. Latz dozed there against her husband's shoulder, until about ten, when he kissed her awake to forage with him in the great, white porcelain refrigerator and then to bed.

And Alma. Almost, she tiptoed through these months. Not that her scorching awareness of what must have crouched low in Louis' mind ever diminished. Sometimes, although still never by word, she could see the displeasure mount in his face.

If she entered in on a tête-à-tête, as she did once, when by chance she had sniffed the curative smell of spirits of camphor on the air of a room through which her mother had passed, and came to drag her off that night to share her own lace-covered and ivory bed.

Again: upon the occasion of an impulsively planned motor trip and week-end to Lakewood, her intrusion had been so obvious.

"Want to join us, Alma?"

"O — yes — thank you, Louis."

"But I thought you and Leo were ——"

"No, no, I'd rather go with you and mama, Louis."

Even her mother had smiled rather strainedly. Louis' invitation, politely uttered, had said so plainly: "Are we two never to be alone. Your mother and I?"

Oh, there was no doubt that Louis Latz was in love and with all the delayed fervor of first youth.

There was something rather throat-catching about his treatment of her mother that made Alma want to cry.

He would never tire of marveling, not alone at the wonder of her, but at the wonder that she was his.

"No man has ever been as lucky in women as I have, Carrie," he told her once in Alma's hearing. "It seemed to me that after — my little mother, there couldn't ever be another — and now you! You!"

At the business of sewing some beads on a lamp-shade, Carrie looked up, her eyes dewy.

"And I felt that way about one good husband," she said, "and now I see there could be two."

Alma tiptoed out.

The third month of this, she was allowing Leo Friedlander his two evenings a week. Once to the theater in a modish little sedan car which Leo drove himself. One evening at home in the rose and mauve drawing-room. It delighted Louis and Carrie slyly to have in their friends for poker over the dining-room table these evenings, leaving the young people somewhat indirectly chaperoned until as late as midnight. Louis' attitude with Leo was one of winks, quirks, slaps on the back and the curving voice of innuendo.

"Come on in, Leo, the water's fine!"

"Louis!" This from Alma stung to crimson and not arch enough to feign that she did not understand.

"Loo, don't tease," said Carrie, smiling, but then closing her eyes as if to invoke help to want this thing to come to pass.

But Leo was frankly the lover, kept not without difficulty on the edge of his ardor. A city youth with gymnasium bred shoulders, fine, pole vaulter's length of limb and a clean tan skin that bespoke cold drubbings with Turkish towels.

And despite herself, Alma, who was not without a young girl's feelings for nice detail, could thrill to this sartorial svelteness and to the patent-leather lay of his black hair which caught the light like a polished floor.

The kind of sweetness he found in Alma he could never articulate even to himself. In some ways she seemed hardly to have the pressure of vitality to match his, but on the other hand, just that slower beat to her may have heightened his sense of prowess. His greatest delight seemed to lie in her pallid loveliness. "White Honeysuckle," he called her and the names of all the beautiful white flowers he knew. And then one night, to the rattle of poker chips from the remote dining-room, he jerked her to him without preamble, kissing her mouth down tightly against her teeth.

"My sweetheart. My little, white carnation sweetheart. I won't be held off any longer. I'm going to carry you away for my little moon-flower wife."

She sprang back prettier than he had ever seen her in the dishevelment from where his embrace had dragged at her hair.

"You mustn't," she cried, but there was enough of the conquering male in him to read easily into this a mere plating over her desire.

"You can't hold me at arm's length any longer. You've maddened me for months. I love you. You love me. You do. You do," and crushed her to him, but this time his pain and his surprise genuine as she sprang back, quivering.

"You — I — mustn't!" she said, frantic to keep her lips from twisting, her little lacy frizzle of a handkerchief a mere string from winding.

"Mustn't what?"

"Mustn't," was all she could repeat and not weep her words.

"Won't — I — do?"

"It's — mama."

"What?"

"You see — I — she's all alone."

"You adorable, she's got a brand-new husky husband."

"No — you don't — understand."

Then, on a thunder-clap of inspiration, hitting his knee, "I have it. Mama-baby! That's it. My girlie is a cry-baby, mama-baby!" And made to slide along the divan toward her, but up flew her two small hands, like fans.

"No," she said with the little bang back in her voice which steadied him again. "I mustn't! You see, we're so close. Sometimes it's more as if I were the mother and she my little girl."

Misery made her dumb.

"Why don't you know, dear, that your mother is better able to take care of herself than you are. She's bigger and stronger. You — you're a little white flower."

"Leo — give me time. Let me think."

"A thousand thanks, Alma, but I love you. I love you and want so terribly for you to love me back."

"I — do."

"Then tell me with kisses."

Again she pressed him to arm's length.

"Please, Leo. Not yet. Let me think. Just one day. Tomorrow."

"No, no. Now."

"Tomorrow."

"When?"

"Evening."

"No, morning."

"All right Leo — tomorrow morning ——"

"I'll sit up all night and count every second in every minute and every minute in every hour."

She put up her soft little fingers to his lips.

"Dear boy," she said.

And then they kissed and after a little swoon to his nearness she struggled like a caught bird and a guilty one.

"Please go, Leo," she said, "leave me alone ——"

"Little mama-baby sweetheart," he said. "I'll build you a nest right next to hers. Good night, little White Flower. I'll be waiting, and remember, counting every second of every minute and every minute of every hour."

For a long time she remained where he had left her, forward on the pink divan, her head with a listening look to it, as if waiting an answer for the prayers that she sent up.

At two o'clock that morning, by what intuition she would never know, and with such leverage that she landed out of bed plump on her two feet, Alma, with all her faculties into trace like fire-horses, sprang out of sleep.

It was a matter of twenty steps across the hall. In the white tiled Roman bathroom, the muddy circles suddenly out and angry beneath her eyes, her mother was standing before one of the full-length mirrors — snickering.

There was a fresh little grave on the inside of her right fore arm.

Sometimes in the weeks that followed, a sense of the miracle of what was happening would clutch at Alma's throat like a fear.

Louis did not know.

That the old neuralgic recurrences were more frequent

again, yes. Already plans for a summer trip abroad, on a curative mission bent, were taking shape. There was a famous nerve specialist, the one who had worked such wonders on his little mother's cruelly rheumatic limbs, reassuringly foremost in his mind.

But except that there were not infrequent and sometimes twenty-four hour sieges when he was denied the sight of his wife, he had learned with a male's acquiescence to the frailties of the other sex, to submit, and with no great understanding of pain, to condone.

And as if to atone for these more or less frequent lapses there was something pathetic, even a little heart-breaking, in Carrie's zeal for his wellbeing. No duty too small. One night she wanted to unlace his shoes and even shine them, would have, in fact, except for his fierce catching of her into his arms and for some reason, his tonsils aching as he kissed her.

Once after a "spell" she took out every garment from his wardrobe and kissing them piece by piece, put them back again and he found her so, and they cried together, he of happiness.

In his utter beatitude, even his resentment of Alma continued to grow but slowly. Once, when after forty-eight hours she forbade him rather fiercely an entrance into his wife's room, he shoved her aside almost rudely, but at Carrie's little shriek of remonstrance from the darkened room, backed out shamefacedly and apologized next day in the conciliatory language of a tiny wrist-watch.

But a break came, as she knew and feared it must.

One evening during one of these attacks, when for two days Carrie had not appeared at the dinner table, Alma, entering when the meal was almost over, seated herself rather exhaustedly at her mother's place opposite her stepfather.

He had reached the stage when that little unconscious usurpation in itself could annoy him.

"How's your mother?" he asked, dourly for him.

"She's asleep."

"Funny. This is the third attack this month and each time it lasts longer. Confound that neuralgia."

"She's easier now."

He pushed back his plate.

"Then I'll go in and sit with her while she sleeps."

She who was so fastidiously dainty of manner, half rose, spilling her soup.

"No," she said, "you mustn't! Not now!" And sat down again hurriedly, wanting not to appear perturbed.

A curious thing happened then to Louis. His lower lip came pursing out like a little shelf and a hitherto unsuspected look of pigginess fattened over his rather plump face.

"You quit butting into me and my wife's affairs, you, or get the hell out of here," he said, without changing his voice or his manner.

She placed her hand to the almost unbearable flutter of her heart.

"Louis! You mustn't talk like that to — me!"

"Don't make me say something I'll regret. You! Only take this tip, you! There's one of two things you better do. Quit trying to come between me and her or — get out."

"I — she's sick."

"Naw, she ain't. Not as sick as you make out. You're trying, God knows why, to keep us apart. I've watched you. I know your sneaking kind. Still water runs deep. You've never missed a chance since we're married to keep us apart. Shame!"

"I — she —"

"Now mark my word, if it wasn't to spare her, I'd have invited you out long ago. Haven't you got any pride?"

"I have. I have," she almost moaned and could have crumpled up there and swooned in her humiliation.

"You're not a regular girl. You're a she-devil. That's what you are! Trying to come between your mother and me. Ain't you ashamed? What is it you want?"

"Louis — I don't —"

"First you turn down a fine fellow like Leo Friedlander, so he don't come to the house any more and then you take out on us whatever is eating you, by trying to come between me and the finest woman that ever lived, Shame. Shame."

"Louis," she said. "Louis," wringing her hands in a

dry wash of agony, "can't you understand? She'd rather have me. It makes her nervous trying to pretend to you that she's not suffering when she is. That's all, Louis. You see, she's not ashamed to suffer before me. Why, Louis — that's all. Why should I want to come between you and her? Isn't she dearer to me than anything in the world and haven't you been the best friend to me a girl could have? That's all — Louis."

He was placated and a little sorry and did not insist further upon going into the room.

"Funny," he said. "Funny," and adjusting his spectacles, snapped open his newspaper for a lonely evening.

The one thing that perturbed Alma almost more than anything else, as the dreaded cravings grew, with each siege her mother becoming more brutish and more given to profanity, was where she obtained the drug.

The well-thumbed old doctor's prescription she had purloined even back in the hotel days, and embargo and legislation were daily making more and more furtive and prohibitive the traffic in narcotics.

Once Alma, mistakenly too, she thought later, had suspected a chauffeur of collusion with her mother and abruptly dismissed him. To Louis' rage.

"What's the idea," he said out of Carrie's hearing, of course. "Who's running this shebang anyway?"

Once after Alma had guarded her well for days, scarcely leaving her side, Carrie laughed sardonically up into her daughter's face, her eyes as glassy and without swimming fluid as a doll's.

"I get it! But wouldn't you like to know where? Yah!"

And to Alma's horror she slapped her quite roundly across the cheek.

And then one day, after a long period of quiet, when Carrie had lavished her really great wealth of contrite love upon her daughter and husband, spending on Alma and loading her with gifts of jewelry and finery to somehow express her grateful adoration of her; paying her husband the secret penance of twofold fidelity to his well-being and every whim, Alma, returning from a trip, taken reluctantly, and at her mother's bidding, down to the basement trunk room, found her gone, a modish black-

lace hat and the sable coat missing from the closet.

It was early afternoon, sunlit and pleasantly cold.

The first rush of panic and the impulse to dash after, stayed, she forced herself down into a chair, striving with the utmost difficulty for coherence of procedure.

Where in the half hour of her absence had her mother gone? Matinee? Impossible! Walking. Hardly probable. Upon inquiry in the kitchen neither of the maids had seen nor heard her depart. Motoring? With a hand that trembled in spite of itself, Alma telephoned the garage. Car and chauffeur were there. Incredible as it seemed, Alma, upon more than one occasion had lately been obliged to remind her mother that she was becoming careless of the old pointedly rosy hand. Manicurist? She telephoned the Bon Ton Beauty Parlor. No! Where, oh God, where? Which way to begin? That was what troubled her most. To start right, so as not to lose a precious second.

Suddenly, and for no particular reason, Alma began a hurried search through her mother's dresser-drawers of lovely personal appointments.

A one-inch square of newspaper clipping apparently gouged from the sheet with a hairpin, caught her eye from the top of one of the gold-backed hair-brushes. Dawn-ingly, Alma read.

It described in brief detail the innovation of a newly equipped Narcotic Clinic on the Bowery below Canal Street, provided to medically administer to the pathological cravings of addicts.

Fifteen minutes later Alma emerged from the subway at Canal Street and with three blocks toward her destination ahead, started to run.

At the end of the first block she saw her mother, in the sable coat and the black-lace hat, coming toward her.

Her first impulse was to run faster and yoo-hoo, but she thought better of it and by biting her lips and digging her fingernails, was able to slow down to a casual walk.

Carrie's fur coat was flaring open and because of the quality of her attire down there where the bilge waters of the city-tide flow and eddy, stares followed her.

Once, to the stoppage of Alma's heart, she halted and said a brief word to a truckman as he crossed the sidewalk

with a bill of lading. He hesitated, laughed and went on.

Then she quickened her pace and went on, but as if with a sense of being followed, because constantly as she walked, she jerked a step, to look back, and then again, over her shoulder.

A second time she stopped, this time to address a little nub of a woman without a hat and lugging one-sidedly a stack of men's basted waistcoats, evidently for homework in some tenement. She looked and muttered her un-understanding of whatever Carrie had to say and shambled on.

Then Mrs. Latz spied her daughter, greeting her without surprise or any particular recognition.

"Thought you could fool me! Heh, Louis! Alma."

"Mama, it's Alma, It's all right. Don't you remember, we had this appointment? Come, dear."

"No, you don't! That's a man following. Shh-h-h-h, Louis. I was fooling. I went up to him (snicker) and I said to him, 'Give you five dollars for a doctor's certificate.' That's all I said to him, or any of them. He's in a white carnation, Louis. You can find him by the — it's on his coat lapel. He's coming! Quick —"

"Mama, there's no one following. Wait, I'll call a taxi!"

"No, you don't! He tried to put me in a taxi, too. No, you don't!"

"Then the subway, dearest. You'll sit quietly beside Alma in the subway, won't you, Carrie. Alma's so tired."

Suddenly Carrie began to whimper.

"My baby! Don't let her see me. My baby. What am I good for? I've ruined her life. My precious sweetheart's life. I hit her once — Louis — in the mouth. God won't forgive me for that."

"Yes, He will, dear, if you come."

"It bled. Alma, tell him mama lost her doctor's certificate. That's all I said to him — give you five dollars for a doctor's certificate — he had a white carnation — right lapel — stingy! Quick! He's following!"

"Sweetheart, please, there's no one coming."

"Don't tell! Oh, Alma darling — mama's ruined your life. Her sweetheart baby's life."

"No, darling, you haven't. She loves you if you'll

come home with her, dear, to bed. before Louis gets home and ——”

“No. No. He mustn’t see. Never this bad — was I, darling — oh — oh ——”

“No, mama — never — this bad. That’s why we must hurry.”

“Best man that ever lived. Best baby. Ruin. Ruin.”

“Mama, you — you’re making Alma tremble so that she can scarcely walk if you drag her back so. There’s no one following, dear. I won’t let any one harm you. Please, sweetheart — a taxicab.”

“No. I tell you he’s following. He tried to put me into a taxicab.”

“Then mama, listen. Do you hear! Alma wants you to listen. If you don’t — she’ll faint. People are looking. Now I want you to turn square around and look. No, look again. You see now, there’s no one following. Now, I want you to cross the street over there to the subway. Just with Alma, who loves you. There’s nobody following. Just with Alma who loves you.”

And then Carrie, whose lace hat was crazily on the back of her head, relaxed enough so that through the enormous maze of the traffic of trucks and the heavier drags of the lower city, she and her daughter could wind their way.

“My baby. My poor Louis,” she kept saying. “The worst I’ve ever been. Oh — Alma — Louis — waiting — before we get there — Louis.”

It was in the tightest tangle of the crossing and apparently on this conjuring of her husband, that Carrie jerked suddenly free of Alma’s frail hold.

“No — no — not home — now. Him. Alma!” And darted back against the breast of the down side of the traffic.

There was scarcely more than the quick rotation of her arm around with the spoke of a truck wheel, so quickly she went down.

It was almost a miracle, her kind of death, because out of all that jam of tonnage, she carried only one bruise, a faint one, near the brow.

And the wonder was that Louis Latz in his grief was, so proud.

"To think," he kept saying over and over again and unabashed at the way his face twisted, "to think they should have happened to me. Two such women in one lifetime, as my little mother — and her. Fat little old Louis to have had those two. Why just the memory of my Carrie — is almost enough — to think old me should have a memory like that — it is almost enough — isn't it, Alma?"

She kissed his hand

That very same, that dreadful night, almost without her knowing it, her throat-tearing sobs broke loose, her face to the waistcoat of Leo Friedlander.

He held her close. Very, very close.

"Why sweetheart," he said, "I could cut out my heart to help you. Why, sweetheart. Shh-h-h, remember what Louis says. Just the beautiful memory — of — her — is — wonderful——"

"Just — the b-beautiful — memory — you'll always have it too — of her — my mama — won't you, Leo? Won't you?"

"Always," he said, when the tight grip in his throat had eased enough.

"Say — it again — Leo."

"Always."

She could not know how dear she became to him then, because not ten minutes before, from the very lapel against which her cheek lay pressed, he had unpinned a white carnation.